America is an exceptional country when it comes to guns. It's one of the few countries in which the right to bear arms is constitutionally protected, and presidential candidates in other nations don't cook bacon with guns. But America's relationship with guns is unique in another crucial way: Among developed nations, the US is far and away the most violent — in large part due to the easy
America's unique problem with gun violence

America has six times as many firearm homicides as Canada, and 15 times as many as Germany.
This chart, compiled using United Nations data collected by the Guardian's Simon Rogers (http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2012/homicides-ownership-world-list#data), shows that America far and away leads other developed countries when it
comes to gun-related homicides. Why? Extensive reviews of the research by the Harvard School of Public Health’s Injury Control Center (http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/hicrc/firearms-research/guns-and-death/) suggest the answer is pretty simple: The US is an outlier on gun violence because it has way more guns than other developed nations.

Image credit: Javier Zarracina/Vox
There have been at least 885 mass shootings since Sandy Hook.
In December 2012, a gunman walked into Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, and killed 20 children, six adults, and himself. Since then, there have been at least 885 mass shootings, with shooters killing at least 1,144 people and wounding 3,180.
more, as this map (http://www.vox.com/a/mass-shootings-sandy-hook) (click to view the interactive version) shows.

The counts come from the Mass Shooting Tracker (http://shootingtracker.com/wiki/Main_Page), a crowdsourced database that tracks shootings since 2013. As with any crowdsourced database, it's likely missing some shootings, and some of the shootings are missing details.

The tracker uses a fairly broad definition of "mass shooting": It includes not just shootings in which four or more people were murdered, but shootings in which four or more people were shot at all. The database's organizers explained their reasoning on their website: "For instance, in 2012 Travis Steed and others shot 18 people total. Miraculously, he only killed one. Under the incorrect definition of mass shooting, that event
would not be considered a mass shooting! Arguing that 18 people shot during one event is not a mass shooting is absurd."

Even under this broad definition, it's worth noting that mass shootings make up a tiny portion of America's firearm deaths, which totaled more than 32,000 (http://www.vox.com/cards/gun-violence-facts/gun-suicide-homicide-common) in 2013.

Image credit: Soo Oh/Vox (http://www.vox.com/a/mass-shootings-sandy-hook)
Whenever a mass shooting occurs, supporters of gun rights often argue that it’s inappropriate to bring up political debates about gun control in the aftermath of a tragedy. For example, Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal, a strong supporter of gun rights, criticized (http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/09/18/is-not-the-time-for-new-gun-laws.html) President Barack Obama for "trying to score cheap political points" when the president mentioned (http://time.com/3926839/president-
But if this argument is followed to its logical end, then it will never be the right time to discuss mass shootings, as Christopher Ingraham pointed out at the Washington Post (http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonkblog/wp/2015/08/26/were-now-averaging-more-than-one-mass-shooting-per-day-in-2015/). Under the Mass Shooting Tracker's definition of mass shootings, America has nearly one mass shooting a day. So if lawmakers are forced to wait for a time when there isn’t a mass shooting to talk gun control, they could find themselves waiting for a very long time.

Image credit: Christopher Ingraham/Washington Post (http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonkblog/wp/2015/08/26/were-now-averaging-more-than-one-mass-shooting-per-day-in-2015/)
More guns, more violence

States with more guns have more gun deaths

Using data from a
study in *Pediatrics* (http://www.pediatricsdigest.mobi/content/116/3/e370.full) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (http://www.statehealthfacts.org/comparemaptable.jsp?ind=113&cat=2), Mother Jones (http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2013/01/pro-gun-myths-fact-check%20) put together the chart above that shows states with more guns tend to have far more gun deaths. And it's not just one study. "Within the United States, a wide array of empirical evidence indicates that more guns in a community leads to more homicide," David Hemenway, the Harvard Injury Control Research Center’s director, wrote in *Private Guns, Public Health* (http://books.google.com/books?id=iANw1pb4fPAC&pg=PA61&lpg=PA61&dq=david+hemenway+%22more+guns+in+a+community+lead+to+more+homicide%22&source=bl&ots=GMTI ... d=0CDEQ6AEwAg#v=onepage&q=david%20hemenway%20%22more%20guns%20in%20a%20community%20lead%20to%20more%20homicide%22&f=false)

Read more in Mother Jones's "10 Pro-Gun Myths, Shot Down." (http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2013/01/pro-gun-myths-fact-check)
It's not just the US: Developed countries with more guns also have more gun homicides.
Image credit: Tewksbury Lab (http://tewksburylab.org/blog/2012/12/gun-violence-and-gun-ownership-lets-look-at-the-data/)

States with tighter gun
When economist Richard Florida (http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2011/geography-of-gun-deaths/69354/) took a look at gun deaths and other social indicators, he found that higher populations, more stress, more
immigrants, and more mental illness didn't correlate with more gun deaths. But he did find one telling correlation: States with tighter gun control laws have fewer gun-related deaths.


Still, gun homicides (like all homicides) are declining:
The good news is that all firearm homicides, like all homicides and crime (http://www.vox.com/cards/crime-rate-drop), are on the decline. There's still a lot of debate among criminal justice experts about why this crime drop is occurring — some of the most credible ideas include mass incarceration, more and better policing, and reduced lead exposure from gasoline. But one theory that researchers have widely debunked is the idea that more guns have deterred crime.
America's biggest gun problem is suicide

— in fact, the opposite may be true, based on research compiled by the Harvard School of Public Health's Injury Control Center (http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/hicrc/firearms-research/guns-and-death/).


Most gun deaths are suicides
Firearm suicides versus homicides

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Although America's political debate about guns tends to
focus on grisly mass shootings and murders, a majority of gun-related deaths in the US are suicides. As Vox's Dylan Matthews (http://www.vox.com/2015/6/3/8721267/gun-suicide-gun-control) explained, this is actually one of the most compelling reasons for reducing access to guns — there is a lot of research (http://www.vox.com/2015/6/3/8721267/gun-suicide-gun-control) that shows greater access to guns dramatically increases the risk of suicide.

Image credit: German Lopez/Vox
More guns, more suicides

Reported suicides between 2001 and 2005

States with highest rates of gun ownership
States with lowest rates of gun ownership

Source: "Guns and Suicide in the United States"
Guns allow people to kill themselves much more easily.
Perhaps *the* reason access to guns so strongly contributes to suicides is that guns are much deadlier than alternatives like cutting and poison.

Jill Harkavy-Friedman, vice president of research for the [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](https://www.afsp.org/), previously
explained (http://www.vox.com/2015/7/30/9068255/suicide-impulsive-gun-control) that this is why reducing access to guns can be so important to preventing suicides: Just stalling an attempt or making it less likely to result in death makes a huge difference.

"Time is really key to preventing suicide in a suicidal person," Harkavy-Friedman said. "First, the crisis won't last, so it will seem less dire and less hopeless with time. Second, it opens the opportunity for someone to help or for the suicidal person to reach out to someone to help. That's why limiting access to lethal means is so powerful."

She added, "If we keep the method of suicide away from a person when they consider it, in that moment they will not switch to another method. It doesn't mean they never will. But in that moment, their thinking is very inflexible and
rigid. So it's not like they say, 'Oh, this isn't going to work. I'm going to try something else.' They generally can't adjust their thinking, and they don't switch methods.'

Image credit: Estelle Caswell/Vox
When countries reduced access to guns, they saw a drop in the number of firearm suicides. The data above, taken from a paper (http://ftp.iza.org/dp4995.pdf) published in the journal IZA, shows that suicides dropped dramatically after the Australian government set up a gun buyback program that reduced
There are hundreds of police shootings every year in America

The number of firearms in the country by about one-fifth.

Australia is far from alone in these types of results. A study from Israeli researchers found that suicides among Israeli soldiers dropped by 40 percent — particularly on weekends — when the military stopped letting soldiers take their guns home over the weekend.

This data and research have a clear message: States and countries can significantly reduce the number of suicides by restricting access to guns.

Image credit: Estelle Caswell/Vox
Since the shooting of Michael Brown, police have killed more than 1,100 people.
Since the August 9, 2014, police shooting of Michael Brown (http://www.vox.com/cards/mike-brown-protests-ferguson-missouri) in Ferguson, Missouri, police have killed at least 1,112 people, as this map (http://www.vox.com/a/police-shootings-ferguson-map) (click
to view the interactive version) shows.

Fatal Encounters (http://www.fatalencounters.org/), a nonprofit, has tracked these killings by collecting reports from the media, public, and law enforcement and verifying them through news reports. Some of the data is incomplete, with details about a victim’s race, age, and other factors sometimes missing. It also includes killings that were potentially legally justified, and is likely missing some killings entirely.

A huge majority of the 1,112 deaths on the map are from gunshots, which is hardly surprising given that guns are so deadly compared with other tools used by police. There are also noticeable numbers of fatalities from vehicle crashes, stun guns, and asphyxiations. In some cases, people died from stab wounds, medical emergencies, and what’s


Police are more likely to be killed in states with more guns, more police officers are also killed on duty.
homicides in states with more guns

Homicides per 10,000 law enforcement officers

Source: "Firearm Prevalence and Homicides of Law Enforcement Offic in the United States"

Given that states with more guns tend to have more
homicides, it isn't too surprising that, as a study (http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2015.302749) in the American Journal of Public Health found, states with more guns also have more cops die in the line of duty.

Researchers looked at federal data for firearm ownership and homicides of police officers across the US over 15 years. They found that states with more gun ownership had more cops killed in homicides: Every 10 percent increase in firearm ownership correlated with 10 additional officers killed in homicides over the 15-year study period.

The findings could help explain why US police officers appear (http://www.vox.com/2015/6/9/8751541/police-shootings-international) to kill more people than cops in other developed countries. For US police officers, the higher rates of guns and gun violence — even against them — in America mean they not only will
encounter more guns and violence, but they can expect to encounter more guns and deadly violence, making them more likely to anticipate and perceive a threat and use deadly force as a result.

Image credit: German Lopez/Vox

America's political fight over guns

Support for gun ownership has sharply increased since the early '90s.
Over the past 20 years, Americans have clearly shifted from supporting gun control measures to greater support of "protecting the right of Americans to own guns," according to Pew Research Center surveys (http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/01/09/a-public-opinion-trend-that-matters-priorities-for-gun-policy/). This shift has happened even as major mass shootings, such as the attacks on Columbine High School and Sandy Hook Elementary School, have received more press attention.
High-profile shootings don't appear to lead to more support for gun control

Although mass shootings are often viewed as some of the worst acts of gun violence, they seem to have little effect on public opinion about gun rights. That helps explain why
Americans' support for the right to own guns appears to be rising over the past 20 years even as more of these mass shootings make it to the news.

Image credit: Pew Research Center (http://www.people-press.org/2012/07/30/views-on-gun-laws-unchanged-after-aurora-shooting/)

But specific gun control policies are fairly popular.
Although Americans say they want to protect the right to bear arms, they're very much supportive of many gun policy proposals — including some fairly contentious ideas, such as more background checks on private and gun show sales and banning semi-automatic and assault-style weapons.

This type of contradiction isn't exclusive to gun policy issues. For example, although most Americans say they don't like Obamacare (http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/other/obama_and_democrats_health_care_plan-1130.html), most of them do like the specific policies in the health-care law (http://kff.org/health-reform/poll-finding/march-2013-tracking-poll/). Americans just don't like some policy ideas until you get specific.

For people who believe the empirical evidence that more guns mean more violence, this contradiction is the source of a lot of frustration. Americans by
and large support policies that reduce access to guns. But once these policies are proposed, they're broadly spun by politicians and pundits into attempts to "take away your guns." So nothing gets done, and preventable deaths keep occurring.

Image credit: Pew Research Center (http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/01/09/a-public-opinion-trend-that-matters-priorities-for-gun-policy/)